

Dana Kery
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Re: Support for Raised HB 6517

To the members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I, Dana Kery, a parent of two dyslexic students living in Fairfield, CT, fully support Raised HB 6517, An Act to implement the recommendations of the task force to analyze the implementation of laws governing dyslexia instruction and training.

Statistically, within this committee, there are likely four members who are dyslexic learners – approximately 20% of the general population. Based upon my personal family experience, along with the findings of the Dyslexia Task Force, our schools are failing approximately 20% of our school population, and most teachers are not familiar with identification of a dyslexic learner. Dyslexia is not an indicator of low IQ; alternatively, dyslexia has been referred to as the “MIT disease” due to the number of dyslexic students who attend MIT. Dyslexic learners often have strong verbal communication skills, spatial awareness and 3D thinking, among other traits. Structured literacy is considered good practice in teaching all students to read.

A greater understanding of educator competencies is very much needed. Higher education reform to include phonics and structured literacy is of utmost importance. Based upon the findings of the Dyslexia Task Force, the outcomes within Stonington School District, the reports of Allison Van Etten and Heather Harris, along with conversation of Jule McCombes-Tolis and Laura Reynolds, the need for an evaluation of higher education and allowances for teacher contracts to allow for teacher education in phonics based structured literacy are both necessary.

In 2014, I inquired about having my son tested for dyslexia, I was told “we do not test for it, and we do not teach to it”; In 2018, through an FOI request to the Fairfield School District, I learned that my son’s middle school did not have one teacher with training to identify, understand, or remediate the gaps associated with dyslexic learning. The reading support my son had received for seven years was the equivalent of giving a blind person a brighter light. Rather than invest my time in conflict with a school that could not deliver effective instruction, I had private testing completed, chose to shift to private school and private tutoring. With appropriate teaching, my sons are thriving. All families should have access to FAPE, free appropriate public education.

Dyslexia legislation has been discussed multiple times during the last 10 years. This committee has an opportunity to address the needs of all students. Connecticut is not at a loss for strong evidence-based research. UCONN and Yale University both have Dyslexic learning institutes. UCONN has launched appriseproject.org, a freely accessible dyslexia screener tablet app. Research in identifying and supporting dyslexic learning is realistic and effective. All students

will benefit from a shift to structured literacy, and the long term savings of effective learning beginning with the kindergarten level is a sound decision.

Please support Raised HB 6517, along with a shift to Structured Literacy in all schools to support learning for all students.

Thank you.

Dana Kery